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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VP ELVIN SANTOS' MARCH GARNERS MORE SUPPORTERS
THAN ALBA RALLY

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 787

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Simon Henshaw, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Vice President and current Liberal Party presidential candidate Elvin Santos led a march to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) on September 8 that garnered the support of over 20,000 people. Santos was protesting the fact that the TSE disqualified him as a candidate (see reftel). He told Charge on September 2 he would ask the TSE to reconsider his candidacy, and ask head magistrate Augusto Aguilar (Liberal Party), who had voted against him, to recuse himself from the decision. The TSE reconsidered Santos' proposal, but Aguilar did not recuse himself and the tribunal decided against changing its decision. National Party Magistrate Jacobo Hernandez originally supported Santos' candidacy, but it appears he did not support reversing the first TSE decision. His spouse told us he traveled to Roatan on September 7 to get away from the controversy, and that the verdict was agreed upon by all three magistrates over the weekend.

¶2. (C) Media is reporting that the crowds were raucous, but respectful, and did not engage in any violent acts like they did during the previous protests on August 22. (Note: During the meeting with Charge, Santos expressed worry that rival Liberal Party factions might try to infiltrate his march with violent actors, in order to blame Santos for their transgressions. End Note.) The march was impressive, and analysts are saying that the event will increase Santos' chances of acceptance by the general population as a deserving candidate. Santos has no other choice now but to take his case to the Supreme Court.

¶3. (C) Comment: Santos continues to gain momentum, especially by putting on this very well organized and peaceful march. Even though he did not pay any of his supporters or offer them food or transportation, as far as we know, he was still able to garner more supporters than President Zelaya's August 25th ALBA rally. Media is increasingly likening Santos to Ricardo Maduro, who was allowed to run for president in 2004, despite having been born in Panama (for which the TSE originally disqualified him). Santos has been reluctant to take his case to the Supreme Court as he fears a pact has already been made between Chief Justice Vilma Morales and President of the Congress, (and rival Liberal Party candidate) Roberto Micheletti, but he can no longer put it off. The court's decision will directly impact who is elected the next

president of Honduras, as Santos has a good chance of winning the Liberal Party's primary and would be a formidable candidate against the Nationalists. End Comment.
HENSHAW